**Maldives Dive Travel**

With more than 1,200 islands and idyllic islets, the Maldives is host to 159 active resorts as of January 2023. We usually associate the Island Nation with ultimate relaxation and tranquility, pristine waters, and unspoiled beaches combined with the ultimate luxury experiences.

Besides luxury experiences, what makes the Maldives such a sought-after holiday destination is for the most part the immaculate beauty offered to us by mother nature. Crystal clear water inhabited by endless colorful fish, coral reefs and palm tree leaves gently caressed by the sea breeze would simply not be there had human speculation fully taken over.

When it comes to diving, the Maldives is famous for its insane variety of marine life, particularly of large species such as manta rays, eagle rays, sharks and turtles. It is definitely a paradise for scuba divers of all levels given also the varied underwater landscape.

**How to Dive the Maldives**

**Liveaboard**

Given the crazy amount of dive sites, diving the Maldives on a liveaboard is one of the best possible options. A liveaboard is a large boat equipped with a diving deck (or support boat, called Dhoni in the Maldives) and onboard accommodation.

Liveaboard diving is usually one of the best options for a diving focused holiday, particularly if you are interested in all-inclusive diving packages with 3 to 4 dives per day (including night dive). There currently are 56 Liveaboards operating in the Maldives with several one-, two-, or three-week itineraries available.

With such a wealth of liveaboard options available, you will be able to choose the best option that accommodates your timing, wallet, and diving preferences. Some liveaboards such as [Scuba Spa](https://www.liveaboard.com/diving/fleet/scubaspa?cid=5000&msclkid=08a37c43d5121acb94401a234758a3db) offer mixed packages for divers and non-divers alike, whereas some others offer itineraries that are better suited for **Advanced Divers** (e.g. with many drift dives) . In terms of costs, Liveaboards in the Maldives are generally cheaper than resorts.

Before booking your Liveaboard holiday in the Maldives, you should pay special attention to the required minimum number of dives. Liveaboards are often not the best solution for newbies as most of them require a minimum number of logged dives (usually 30 or 50 logged dives).

 [**15 Best Live Aboards for Maldives**](https://scubadivingoverload.com/15-best-liveaboards-in-the-maldives/)

**Resort**

If you are planning a family, honeymoon, or water sport holiday that includes relax and diving, then a resort stay in the Maldives is definitely for you. With more than 150 resorts spread across 17 Atolls, I am sure you will be able to find the solution that best fits your needs.

Needless to say, Maldivian resorts are generally on the high-end in terms of costs but at the same time offer a wealth of activities, relax opportunities and exploration experiences. Many resorts are located on private islands and feature secluded white sand beaches, blue lagoons, spas, gyms, workstations, meeting venues and water sports centers.

While staying at a resort, you can lounge around on pristine white sand beaches and embark on extra activities like surfing, day tours, water sports and yoga and meditation classes. Most of the resorts have a dive center, this is therefore one of the best options if you are a diving newbie and would like to take your Open Water Diver or Advanced Open Water Diver Certification.

Many resorts are designed explicitly for divers with world-class dive centers and operations offering shore diving, boat diving, night diving, wreck diving and much more!

*Note that while staying at a resort, diving is considered as an extra activity and is usually not included in the “all-inclusive” resort packages. You will read more about this in the costs section.*

**Local Islands**

Although both liveaboard and resort diving are the most common forms of diving in the Maldives, diving from local islands has recently started to gain traction and is becoming increasingly popular.

Staying on a local island (usually in a guesthouse) is a great opportunity for a full immersion into the Maldivian culture and traditions and can be an amazing experience. It is also one of the best ways to discover the Maldives if you are on a budget.

Note, however, that Maldives is an Islamic country and that contrary to resorts and liveaboards, local islands are subject to strict requirements in terms of nudity and alcohol consumption for example.

Before booking a diving trip to a local island you should make sure that there is a dive center available as this is not always the case, and island hopping is not so easy in the Maldives.

**Diving Regions in the Maldives**



This amazing Island Nation has 17 main atolls, that can be split into 5 geographical regions. Most liveaboards will use this terminology to describe their itineraries.

* Far North
* North
* Central
* South
* Deep South

*Note that, unless you are visiting the Maldives on a liveaboard, switching from an atoll to the other will require a private boat or private seaplane trip which can be quite expensive. If you are planning on doing some island hopping via seaplane, you will need to factor in additional transfer time as most seaplane itineraries require a stopover in the Male Seaplane terminal.*

From a landscape point of view, the five Maldivian regions are pretty much similar. On the surface you have small islands with pristine sandy beaches and blue lagoons, and underwater you have pinnacles, walls, overhangs, some caves, and plain open water. In most of the regions you may find turtles, manta rays, black and white tip sharks as well as whale sharks.

You should however pay attention to the fact that some of those species may visit some of the regions only seasonally. For example, if you plan to snorkel with Manta Rays in [Hanifaru Bay](https://www.mymaldives.com/things-to-do/hanifaru-bay/), you will need to plan your trip in the Baa Atoll between late Jue and October. This is the best time to have greater chances of spotting the Maldives’ gentle giants.

In terms of unique characteristics, the central region is the easiest to reach. This is where the capital city Malé is located, together with the [Velana International Airport (MLE).](https://www.macl.aero/) It should come as no surprise that **the central region is the most populated and touristic**. Most of the liveaboards start from Malé and most of the resorts in the central region are reachable via a quick speed boat ride from the airport’s harbor. There are some exceptions for resorts located in the North Male Atoll, that will offer you the possibility of a seaplane transfer.

**The southern regions (south and deep south) can be reached either by internal flights or by seaplane and are more off the beaten track**. They host amazing marine life and are most famous for big species such as black oceanic mantas, 12 species of sharks and ocean sunfish (mola mola).

**The northern regions (north and far north) are even less off the beaten track than the southern regions**. From a scuba diving point of view those regions offer the highest number of unexplored dive sites, caves and wreck diving.

**Maldives Central Region**

Maldives’ central region includes the atolls of Kaafu, Alifu Alifu, Alifu Dhaalu, Vaavu. Some of these names might sound uncommon. Here below you will find the most used alternatives:

* **Kaafu Atoll = Male Atoll** (includes North Male and South Male)
* **Alifu Alifu = Northern Ari or North Ari Atoll**
* **Alifu Dhaalu = Southern Ari or South Ari Atoll**
* **Vaavu Atoll = Includes the natural atolls of Felidhu and the Vattaru Reef.**

The North and South Ari Atolls are often referred to as the “Ari Atoll”.

The central region of the Maldives is surely the most well-known and touristic. This is because most resorts within this region are easily reachable via a short speedboat or seaplane ride.

The Male, Ari and Vaavu Atolls combined offer 82 resorts ranging from normal luxury to uber luxury resorts.

In terms of diving, although the central region of the Maldives is the most populated and touristic, there are some amazing dive sites where you will be able to spot Manta Rays, Whale Sharks (particularly in the South Ari Atoll), plenty of reef sharks and sea turtles.

If you are keen on spotting Mantas and Whale Sharks, you should aim at a resort or liveaboard reaching the South Ari Atoll. The central region is also home to two more secluded atolls: Rasdhoo and Vaavu. The Rashdoo Atoll is mostly famous for its Hammerhead Point, one of the best places in the Maldives where you can spot Hammerhead Sharks. The Vaavu Atoll is instead famous for its drift diving in strong currents.

**Maldives Southern Regions**

The Southern Regions includes 8 atolls which are evenly split between **Maldives’ South and deep South Regions**. Both regions are way calmer and quieter as compared to the Central Region. This means less crowded resorts, fewer liveaboards, and less boat traffic in general. In the Southern region you will generally encounter less divers and dive sites have the chance of being less crowded as there are fewer resorts.

**Maldives’ Southern Region is made up of four main atolls:**

* **Faafu (aka Nilandhoo)**
* **Laamu (aka Hadhdhunmathee)**
* **Thaa (aka Kolhumadulu)**
* **Meemu (Malaku)**

They host 6 resorts in total, with an overall capacity of 542 rooms. Smaller resorts are in Laamu and Thaa.

In terms of diving and dive sites, the Southern region is second to none. Although it is famous for its strong currents, there are quite a few beginner friendly dive sites where you can learn how to scuba. It is also plenty of current-free dive sites in case you are not into drift diving (the ideal spot if you are not into drift diving is the Laamu Atoll).

Marine life is quite varied in Maldives’ Southern region and besides amazing soft corals you will be able to spot napoleon fish, grey reef sharks, dogtooth tuna, eagle rays, and several moray eels species. Given the abundance of current-free dive sites, the Laamu Atoll is also a good location for macro diving and for spotting green turtles. Note that this region of the Maldives is still being developed in terms of diving. This means that despite the abundance of known dive sites, there are many more to be discovered!

**If you are looking for an even more remote area of the Maldives, and think the Southern Region is still too crowded for your tastes, then you should definitely head to Maldives’ Deep South.**

**The Deep South Region is made of 4 main atolls**. Also in this case, the same atoll might be called in different ways:

* **Fuvahmulah**
* **Addu Atoll = Seemu Atoll**
* **Huvadhu Alifu = Huvadhoo Alifu = Gaafu Alifu**
* **Huvadu Dhaalu = Huvadhoo Dhaalu = Gaafu Dhaalu**

Maldives’ Deep South Region is more developed in terms of resorts than the Southern Atolls. This is due to the presence of the Gan International Airport which is expected to become the country’s second international airport after the Velana Airport in Male. Note however that to date, there are no international flights flying to Gan.

The Deep South Region hosts a total of 11 resorts, with an overall capacity of 1316 rooms. Given that the region is relatively large and far from the city of Male, you will still find less crowds than both the Central and the Southern Regions.

If you are into diving with big pelagic species and all sorts of sharks, the Deep South region of the Maldives is definitely for you. Among the different species you will be able to encounter here you have mantas, mola mola, grey reef sharks, black and whitetip reef sharks, tiger sharks, thresher sharks, whale sharks, nurse sharks, hammerhead sharks, and leopard sharks. This region is also an amazing spot to encounter black oceanic mantas, which are becoming an extremely rare species.

Although the region is most famous for its large pelagic species, lots of macro and soft and hard corals diving is available as well.

**Maldives Northern Regions**

If you are really not into crowds and would like to have the chance to explore recently discovered dive sites, then the North Region of The Maldives is the perfect spot.

Maldives’ Northern Regions are the least explored to date and least frequented by tourists and travelers, leaving plenty of room to discover unspoiled white sandy beaches, blue lagoons and sandy coral islands. Reaching the Northern Regions of the Maldives is relatively easy, or at least not harder than reaching the Southern Regions.

Most resorts are less than an hour of seaplane or commercial flight away from the Velana International Airport (MLE).

Diving in the Northern Regions is simply great. Besides some iconic places such as Hanifaru Bay (famous for snorkeling and swimming with mantas), you have a wealth of dive sites and marine life available for all tastes.

**Maldives North Atolls**

**The Maldives Northern Region can be split into North Atolls and Deep North Atolls. Northern Atolls are relatively closer to the Velana International Airport and include:**

* **BAA Atoll,**aka Goidhoo (home to the Unesco Biosphere reserve)
* **RAA Atoll,** aka Maalhosmadulu
* **Lhviyani Atoll**, aka Faadhippolhu

**All of them can be reached with a short seaplane ride from Velana or with a commercial flight and speedboat ride.**

Diving the North Atolls is amazing, this area of the Maldives is particularly famous for soft coral gardens, canyons, caves, and thilas. In the North Atolls you will have also some great opportunities to spot manta rays as there are several cleaning stations.

If you are keen on visiting Hanifaru Bay, make sure you book a resort in the BAA Atoll as this is the closest point to the bay. Almost all resorts in the BAA Atoll organize daily snorkeling or swimming excursions to Hanifaru Bay. If you are not into strong currents and drift diving, both the BAA and RAA atolls offer plenty of dive sites that are not exposed to currents. I have been in both atolls twice and never had a drift dive.

**Maldives Far North Atolls**

Maldives’ Far North Atolls are the least explored of all the Island Nation and definitely worth a visit if you are into diving expeditions and exploration.

The Far North region hosts 12 resorts that are spread across areas with strong to zero currents. It is therefore one of the perfect spots both for adrenaline junkies and for newly certified divers.

**Maldives’ Far North is made of four main Atolls:**

* **Haa Alifu,**aka North Thiladhunmathee
* **Haa Dhaalu,**aka South Thiladhunmathee
* **Shaviyani,**aka Miladhunmadulu
* **Noonu.**

Haa Alifu is almost at the edge of Maldives’Deep North and is abundant in drift dive opportunities. Given the strong currents, the Atoll is the perfect place to spot large pelagic species such as manta Rays and Sharks. In the Haa Alifu Atoll, you will also be able to spot leopard sharks, which are quite rare in the Maldives.

The Haa Dhaalu Atoll is instead characterized by an amazing underwater geology, with plenty of wall dives, pinnacles, and underwater caves. The abundance of caves makes the Haa Dhaalu a perfect place to spot nurse sharks.

The Shaviyani Atoll, also known as Northern Miladhunmadulu Atoll or Miladhunmadulu Uthuruburi is one of the least explored areas of the Maldives. I think this is because there are few liveaboards doing this route and resorts are generally on the uber luxury side. That said, there are also quite some homestay opportunities for the divers that are interested.

Being one of the least explored sites of the Maldives, the Shaviyani Atoll has quite a lot of dive sites that are still to be discovered. The area is famous for its resident guitar shark population (also known as bowmouth guitarfish).

Lastly, the Noonu Atoll is a small Atoll in the Maldives’Far North that is considered the best place in the Maldives for Luxurious Resorts. The Atoll is in fact hosting some of the uber luxury resorts in the Maldives such as Soneva Jani and the Velaa Private Island.

**Best Season to Dive the Maldives**

Diving the Maldives is possible all year round. No matter if traveling in April, May, August, and December you can always experience amazingly nice weather.

Most pelagic species are visible all year round, but they might move across atolls based on temperatures and water currents. This is why if you are planning a trip to the Maldives and want to see some specific marine life, you should check which season is the best for a given specie.

In fact, despite the proximity to the equator, the Maldives do experience some seasonal weather fluctuations (including currents and visibility). Before we look further into the details, you should also consider that most islets in the Maldives are affected from local microclimates. This means that on some of the island you can have a rainy season with little to no rain.

Also note that the Maldives’ Deep South lies on the equator. This means that the area is less affected by seasonality and that you will experience High Season-like conditions throughout the year.

**High Season to visit the Maldives**

**Maldives’ high season, also called Northeast Monsoon Season runs from December to May.**

The Northeast Monsoon Season is also known as Maldives’ dry season and is characterized by calm waters, low wind and clear skies. Water visibility is at its best during this season and can reach 115 to 131 feet (35 to 40 meters)

Needless to say, prices of resorts and liveaboards are at their highest. Note that although water is calm at the surface, currents are at their highest during this season, resulting in plenty of opportunities for drift diving. Strong currents also mean more plankton present in the canals and therefore more opportunities to spot large pelagic species, manta rays and whale sharks.

**Low Season to Visit the Maldives**

Maldives’ Low Season, also known as the Southwest Monsoon Season runs from June to November. Although this is supposed to be rainy season, from personal experience, I can tell you that rain is actually scarce (couple of minutes per day or even at night). The sky tends to be more cloudy than in high season and overall water visibility is lower.

Bear in mind that low water visibility in the Maldives still means 40 to 66 feet (15 to 20 meters). In the Southwest monsoon season you will actually be able to find quite some good deals as resorts and liveaboards are generally cheaper. This is why I actually recommend visiting the Maldives during low season.

**Prices of Diving in the Maldives**

If you are wondering how much it costs to dive the Maldives, you have come to the right place. Maldives is generally an expensive destination, with extremely high-quality standards and diving is no exception.

Many resorts have a diving butler that will prepare all your equipment before each dive. In most cases if you are diving from a boat, your equipment will anyways be set up by your instructor or dive guide. When looking at the prices of diving in the Maldives there are several factors you should be looking at.

The first thing to know is that not all resorts will offer the possibility to do shore diving. This is because not all resorts have a house reef. In such case you will need to add to the cost of diving the cost of the boat which ranges from USD $20 to USD $35 per dive. If you do 3 boat dives per day, you will therefore need to pay from USD $40 to USD $70 for the whole day (two morning boat dives are usually considered as a single dive in terms of boat pricing).

Besides the boat diving price, you will be charged on average between USD $40 to USD $60 per single dive. This includes a guided dive and a full tank of air. Most resorts will offer Nitrox for free, in some cases you might be charged an additional USD $5 per dive.

Almost all resorts will offer diving packages with increasing discounts for a higher number of dives. **In the following table you will see a comparison of the average cost of diving in the Maldives as a single dive and as part of a package.**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Average cost of diving in the Maldives** | **NO Diving Package** | **Diving Package 5 Dives or More** | **Diving Package15 Dives or More** |
| Single Dive | $75 USD | $59 USD | $50 USD |
| 1 Tank Boat Trip | $20 USD | $20 USD | $20 USD |
| Equipment Rental | $35 USD | $35 USD | $35 USD |
| TOTAL (with rented equipment) | $130 USD | $114 USD | $105 USD |
| TOTAL (with own equipment) | $95 USD | $79 USD | $70 USD |

*Average cost of diving in the Maldives*

Yes, diving in the Maldives is quite expensive. On the flip side, the overall quality of the infrastructure – including dive boats – is extremely high.

Quality of rental equipment is also generally high in the Maldives. If instead of a resort you decide to travel locally, the price of a single dive is generally lower and is around USD50 (including boat ride). However, the quality of the rental equipment might differ from the rental equipment you will find in a resort.

**How to get to the Maldives**

Reaching the Maldives is relatively easy as the country has a single international airport. The [Velana International Airport (MLE)](https://www.maleairport.com/) is in the capital city Male. Note that the Male international airport is also known as Naris International Airport. Upon arrival at the airport, you will generally be greeted by a representative of your resort or liveaboard that will take care of guiding you through the transfer process (either via boat, seaplane, or commercial flight).

**How to get to the Maldives from the US**

If you are traveling to the Maldives from the US, you should be aware that there are no direct flights from the US to the Maldives. The quickest way to reach the Maldives from both the East or West Coast is via a stopover in Europe. You will find direct flights to the Maldives from London, Frankfurt, Rome, and Paris. Those flights are generally more expensive than flights from the Middle East. If you want to save some money, I suggest you check direct flights to Male from Dubai, Doha or Muscat.

**Maldives FAQs**

**Do I need a wetsuit to dive in the Maldives?**

**Water temperature in the Maldives has an average of 82.4°F (28°C). A shorty or a 3mm thick wetsuit would be sufficient.** A shorty or full body thin wetsuit is recommended in the Maldives also while snorkeling to protect your body from the sun.

**Maldives Diving Terminology**

**Atoll**  Atoll in the Maldives denotes a ring-shaped coral reef, island, or series of islets.

When referring to Atolls as single islands in the Maldives it is important to know that they might or might not have a lagoon. In the same spirit, not all atolls in the Maldives have a reef. Some Atolls are made purely of sandy beaches.

Additionally, when referring to Atolls in the Maldives one can also mean one of the Administrative regions that are actually made of many smaller atolls. For example, the BAA Atoll is not a single island but a grouping of many small islands and islets.

**Dhoni** If you will be diving from a boat in the Maldives, you will most likely be diving from a Dhoni.

Dhonis are locally made boats that have a peculiar shape. They are relatively large for greater stability and their length may vary.

**Thil** When scuba diving a Thila, you will be scuba diving the peak of an underwater mountain that has a top reef at a relatively shallow depth 15 to 80 ft (5 to 25 meters).

**Kandu** Kandu is the Maldivian name for channels between reefs, islands or atolls. This is where you will be doing drift diving and encounter some of the large pelagic species.

*https://scubadivingoverload.com/scuba-diving-the-maldives-ultimate-guide*